

Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League

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Southern Community Groups Call for the Right to Say No to Natural Gas Facilities Campaign to Safeguard America's Resources

Today community groups in Virginia, North Carolina and Georgia called for the establishment of local veto power over natural gas extraction, transport and use. At rallies, marches and other public events extending from Floyd, Virginia, across North Carolina to Valdosta, Georgia, people joined in a chorus of protests against pipelines, compressor stations, power plants, hydrofracking wells and waste dumps and for the restoration of property rights and local control over energy policy in the Southeast.

Lou Zeller, Executive Director of the Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League, said, "Today we launch the campaign to Safeguard America's Resources because of our nation's dangerous reliance on fossil fuel, including natural gas, which pollutes the air and water. But we also see a parallel danger to our communities, to our society and to our democracy from a dominant oil and gas industry."

At press conferences in county courthouses, community buildings, a university and a small church, League chapters called for action to halt natural gas facilities in their communities. Following the speeches, they joined caravans and parades to focus public

opposition at the local government level. Events across the region echoed the twin themes of danger and opportunity.

Kim McCall, Secretary of the Concerned Citizens of Richmond County, North Carolina, spoke against hydro-fracking and the expansion of Duke Energy's natural gas power plant in Hamlet. She said, "We are petitioning local governments for the ability to veto projects that threaten our homes, our families and our neighbors." The group has petitioned EPA to deny the air permit to increase toxic air pollution by 36% from the combustion turbine electric power plant in her backyard.

To launch their campaign in Lee County, North Carolina, members of EnvironmentalLEE held a prayer vigil and rally at Mount Calvary Baptist Church, which is located in front of the brickyard in Sanford where the dumping 8 million tons of Duke Energy's toxic coal ash is proposed. Deb Hall, a member of EnvironmentalLEE, said, "We are already ground zero for fracking, and the North Carolina General Assembly stripped local governments of their ability to control fracking and coal ash dumping. This threatens our health, the environment, community self-determination, and property rights."

Mark Laity-Snyder, a founding member of Preserve Franklin county, joined others carrying black coffins in a caravan to Floyd, Virginia. He said, "We chose a coffin to represent the loss of a basic American right, the right to be secure in our homes without private companies taking our land." Jenny Chapman, from nearby Preserve Bent Mountain, said, "For a corporation like Mountain Valley Pipeline to override the rights of private citizens to their land, safety and quality of life is unacceptable."

Pat Hill, co-founder of Person County PRIDE in Roxboro, North Carolina, said,

“My husband and I live next to the Republic mega-dump. We want to have a voice in protecting our water and air quality because we live with it every day.” She continued, “The toxic wastes deposited here endanger our health and the health of our neighbors. Coal ash contains arsenic, lead and many other poisons. Because hydrofracking uses secret contaminants, it could have an unknown number of dangerous compounds.”

Michael G. Noll, President of Wiregrass Activists for Clean Energy in Valdosta, Georgia, sounded a note of hope, saying, “This is the beginning of a new era, where we see the unified efforts of communities across the nation to safeguard America’s resources, to wean ourselves of fossil fuels, and to protect the unalienable rights of citizens to clean water and air. I am convinced that safe and renewable sources of energy like solar and wind will be the lunar landing of our generation.”

Mara Robbins, Virginia Campaign Coordinator for the Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League and organizer of the Floyd March and Demonstration, said, “We chose to have this action here because we stand in solidarity with all the counties that are resisting the threat of the Mountain Valley Pipeline.” She pointed to many different communities in three states that are calling for community-level veto power over fossil fuel projects. Referring to her success in pushing the pipeline route out of her home county, she said, “Though Floyd is not in the line of fire at the moment, we claim the right to say NO to dangerous proposals that utilize eminent domain over the wishes of the people. And we think all communities deserve that right.”

The Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League was founded in 1984. The organization has a thirty-year track record of victories over polluting facilities.

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